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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 000113

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [AM](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [KFLU](#)

SUBJECT: ARMENIA: MEDIA REACTION TO AVIAN INFLUENZA
DELEGATION PRESS CONFERENCE

SUMMARY

1. On January 25, a U.S. government inter-agency team visited Armenia as part of a multi-country trip to learn about the region's preparations to address avian influenza. During its visit to Armenia, part of the team held a press conference at the U.S. Embassy. Media coverage of the event was extensive, with major television stations, newspapers, and news agencies reporting on it. Most outlets quoted delegation leader Ann Derse, as well as the Embassy's press release, without providing any commentary. One news agency misquoted Derse, alleging that she denied there were any cases of bird flu in Armenia, and a tabloid daily implied that the threat of avian influenza was being exaggerated. Two opposition newspapers focused on the delegation's praise for Turkey's efforts to fight avian influenza. END SUMMARY.

JUST THE FACTS

2. Armenian Second, Public TV, Kentron, ALM, Shant, and Yerkir Media television stations showed clips of the conference and reported on the Embassy's press release without providing analysis. Television stations focused on delegation leader Ann Derse's statement that no cases of avian influenza have been found yet in Armenia, as well as her comments regarding the assistance that the United States will provide to Armenia. (Note: Derse went on to say that no country was immune to avian influenza and pressed for active surveillance and preparation. End Note.)

3. "Armenia Liberty," RFE/RL's Armenian service, published an article that quotes the U.S. Embassy press release and focuses on the assistance that the United States will provide to Armenia. The article quotes Derse as stating, "The United States is committed to assisting Armenia, and just as a result of today's discussions, some immediate steps will be taken....Protecting the health of the workers who deal with the disease both in the animal and human realm is critical. In this connection, the U.S. will be sending to Armenia within 10 days or so 1,500 kits of personal protective equipment."

4. Arminfo, an independent news agency, quoted the U.S. Embassy's press release at length and included quotes from the press conference. The article states, "Within the coming ten days, the U.S. government will provide supplies such as personal protective equipment, test primers, and an adviser to assist the government in its preparedness and response plan in response to government requests. The best protection against the influenza is active preparation, detecting and containing avian influenza outbreaks, and immediate response, she [Derse] said."

NEWS AGENCY SAYS THERE ARE NO CASES OF BIRD FLU IN ARMENIA

5. Mediamax, a news agency considered to be somewhat pro-government, stated in an article, "There are no cases of bird flu in Armenia, the head of the U.S. government inter-agency team, Anne Derse, said at a briefing in Yerevan today." (Note: Derse actually stated, "Cases [of avian influenza] have not been found in Armenia yet to my understanding." End Note.)

TABLOID REPORTS "EVERYTHING IS FINE" REGARDING BIRD FLU

6. "Haykakan Zhamanak," a tabloid daily, published an article entitled "Don't Worry Be Happy," which implies that the threat of avian influenza is being exaggerated. The article states, "Presently there is no bird flu in Armenia, but an outbreak of it continues to be possible since Armenia is located in a risk zone.' We have heard this for almost a month from the mouths of almost every Armenian official. At the press conference held at the new U.S. Embassy building, almost the same sentence with only a few differences was

repeated by American experts who arrived in the region...Judging from the calmness of the face of the U.S. State Department representative Anne Derse, who is the head of a delegation comprised of representatives from different government agencies, one can be confident that everything is fine regarding bird flu in Armenia."

TWO NEWSPAPERS FOCUS ON COMMENTS REGARDING TURKEY

17. "Aravot," a pro-opposition daily, published an article entitled, "Bird Flu Diplomacy: U.S. experts did not explore the results of their research in Turkey." The article states, "The head of the delegation, Ann Derse, who is a diplomat by profession, successfully avoided all questions regarding the situation in Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and whether the borders of those countries are secure enough to ensure that the disease does not enter or exit the country...thus displaying 'deep diplomacy.' Instead, she and her 'apostles' clarified that she is 'delighted with the preparedness of the Turkish government' and that they 'were treated well by the countries of the Caucasus.'"

18. In an article entitled "The U.S. Delegation Ate Poultry in Turkey," the opposition newspaper "168 Hours" notes, "Ann Derse, the head of the delegation, mentioned that she believes that the countries of the region can learn 'good lessons' from Turkey. In this regard, Derse thinks that there should be no problems between Turkey and Armenia because 'all the countries of the world should cooperate for the sake of health issues.'"

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